



NEW ROMNEY TOWN COUNCIL



COMMUNITY HALL, SPORTS PAVILION AND NURSERY PROJECT UPDATE

Councillor David Wimble published a rather unfortunate article last week in Issue 317 of The Looker, in his capacity as editor of that newspaper. The article contained a whole raft of factually inaccurate information about New Romney Town Council's Community Hall, Sports Pavilion and Nursery Project, despite having first checked this information with the Town Clerk, who provided him with the facts – which are all in the public domain and which he has been able to access throughout the project in his capacity as a Councillor.

Page 2 of The Looker states: "Every effort is made by The Looker newspaper to ensure that information is correct". However, Councillor Wimble did not take any account of the factual information provided by the Town Clerk.

So, in order to correct misinformation published in Councillor Wimble's article:

Italic font in black: lifted directly from Councillor Wimble's article published on page 4 of The Looker Issue 317, dated 25th January 2023

Standard font in blue: fact checked information provided by the Council to correct publicly published misinformation.

Community Hall Saga continues

12 years ago, New Romney was promised a fit for purpose all singing and dancing community sports hall and community centre.

This project was commenced in **2016** with the appointment of a Project Management Team, following some initial public consultation to find out what residents would like in the Town, having concluded a land sale in 2013 which resulted in a sum of money (£650,000.00) to be set aside for all capital projects. Of this sum, £630,000.00 was allocated for a community hall and sports pavilion.

The project was to provide a Community Hall and Sports Pavilion (NOT a sports hall) and to upgrade facilities for the adjacent nursery.

The Council had reserves on money in the bank and with the sale of land down Church Lane, a further £3 million on deposit.

In August 2008, NRTC agreed to find a buyer for the land in Church Lane and agreed to accept a minimum of £850,000 (after all fees and charges had been settled). The land sale was agreed in July 2009 and an offer of £1.4 million was accepted from the Developer (Akehurst Homes) but in 2010, due to the need for the Developer to purchase access land from Shepway District Council, without which the development project could not proceed, the purchase offer was reduced to £1.1 million – reflecting the 22% ransom charged by the District Council for the purchase of the access land. In March 2011, due to a change in housing legislation, the Developer found that anticipated grant funding to provide low cost housing would no longer be forthcoming.

As a result, a further reduction in the purchase price was agreed, without which the Developer would be unable to proceed with the land purchase. The final purchase price was, therefore, agreed in the amount of £820,000.00. This sale was not concluded until January 2013, following which consultation was undertaken to find out what residents would like in New Romney.

At an especial Council meeting in October 2013 (min ref 409/2012-13), it was agreed that this project would be allocated £630,000.00 from the balance of the capital receipt (after first reimbursing general reserves and allocating a small amount to the new outdoor gym and playground on The Greens. A further small amount was allocated, at that time, to new outdoor play equipment, town signage and a potential heritage centre. A Capital Spending Plan was approved which identified these allocations.

The community hall and sports pavilion project commenced in earnest in 2016 following some initial consultation to find out what local residents thought should be provided within these proposed facilities - and in 2017 the intention to upgrade nursery facilities as part of this project was established.

Since then they have sold more land and now agreed in principle to borrow a further £1 million pounds to deliver the hall.

The Town Council did recently conclude the sale of a second parcel of land for £2,001,308.00. On this occasion, it was, indeed, to part-finance the community hall, sports pavilion and nursery project, having decided to progress this large scale community project.

In 2018, it was agreed that an application for a £1 million loan would be submitted following the initial granting of planning consent for this project as it was recognised from the outset that additional funding would be required to deliver a project of this nature.

The Council has NOT agreed in principle to borrow a further £1 million to fund the project; however, it did recently finally acquire the necessary government consent to draw down the originally agreed £1 million loan.

The only problem is the hall that was originally costed at £3 million pounds cannot be built with the money the council has to spend. As at current rates it would probably cost over £7 million and climbing month by month.

The original project design was put out to tender in July 2021 and the tenders received from six well known Kent firms ranged from £3,808,318.00 to £5,080,119.00.

NRTC worked with the lowest tenderer to identify design changes that would reduce costs but this still resulting in a building cost well in excess of the available budget.

In February 2022, the Council took the brave decision, as a result of the aforementioned tendering process, to halt the project in its original design, to set a fixed budget and to re-design the project to be delivered within a fixed budget.

At a recent full council meeting councillors voted to press forward with a costed plan that a construction delivery group called Synergy have proposed. All the councillors except three (David Wimble, who voted against pushing ahead and Paul Carey and newly elected councillor Emily Carey [Emily Carr] who abstained.)

In January 2023, NRTC agreed to move forward with a revised, fully costed design that could be achieved within the available budget. The Synergy project management team and Architect showed the revised scheme, including a new building for the nursery,

would be much better use of public money than re-furbishing the very old Nursery building.

Cllr Wimble stated that the current project appears to be the only project deemed fit for the town and pointed out that on two separate occasions last year he proposed that the council look at a modular system, that many other towns are using. Which are all pre made 40 foot units that arrive on lorries, fully furnished and plumbed and wired and built in the same way that many cruise ships have pre assembled cabins built off site and then joined together on site.

Councillor Wimble had, in fact, suggested that it was worth looking into modular build systems – however, he did not make any formal proposal to do so, as is evidenced by the formal minutes of meetings which are a legal record of all decisions considered at meetings, nor has he at any time presented a paper for consideration by the council; despite being invited by the Chairman to do so in early January 2023.

Having seen several of these building he pointed out that for between £2.2 and £2.6 million the council could have a community hall built this year which would comply with the current planning and would not need the council to borrow any money and ultimately have to pass the cost of borrowing money that the town would have to pay back over the next 40 years.

The current planning application for the Community Hall/Sports Pavilion/Nursery project is Y19/0553/FH and contains very specific requirements for the design which could not be met by the modular build suggested by Councillor Wimble. Hence, any changes to the agreed design would require a new planning application to be presented to the District Council for approval and that is the approach being taken by NRTC, as agreed at Full Council.

Councillor Wimble has never provided New Romney Town Council with any information on a revised design, neither has he tabled any proposal for the Project Steering Group or Full Council to consider.

A single modular building might well be able to be designed for the community hall and sports pavilion; it would not, however, include a second modern building to replace what is currently in use as a much valued nursery for the community. Any change to the original project design will require a planning application re-submission even if a full submission is not required and will take equally as long to be considered by the District Council as a revised planning submission relating to a traditional build. Furthermore, the Town Council is not permitted to 'just go out to one or two companies of its choosing' to procure a building of this cost scale; it must go out to tender using the government contract finder website and offer the contract opportunity out to all interested parties.

This process will take exactly the same amount of time whether the Council has opted for a traditional build project or a modular build project.

David expressed that although he was a great fan of Guy Hollaways designs, it was factual that all of his plans never come in on budget and said the new skate park building in Folkestone that was costed at £3.3 Million but actually ended up costing £16.8 Million and was several years behind schedule as the contractors struggled to build the design.

The example of escalating costs of a Folkestone project that Councillor Wimble has provided appear to be somewhat inaccurate; it was reported in 2016 that the skate park project was expected to cost £7 Million and at the point of issue of construction

contract in 2017, the contract value was reported to be £10 Million. Thus, it would be wrong to suggest that costs escalated by an amount in excess of some 400%.

The Town Council appointed Hollaway Architects to design its community hall, sports pavilion and nursery project. However, the architect is Alex Richards – and the new build design which is currently being worked up into a full planning submission pack has been costed and shown to be deliverable within the available budget, having taken account of current and projected inflation, noting that it would still be important for the council to push on and submit its revised planning application with expediency so that the re-tendering process can be undertaken at the earliest opportunity.

He said, 'Looking at the design presented to the council it looks like a budget school outbuilding and when you compare that to what you can buy off the shelf and within the council's budget, you would think the local people have been short changed! This is not the building the town was promised and I feel that the council are hell bent on delivering a Guy Hollaway design building and not prepared to look at any alternatives.'

Councillor Wimble's own opinion on design is his right. However, had he been in attendance at the Town Council's December meeting or, indeed, had he read the minutes of said meeting, he would be fully aware that the Council had considered whether it should look elsewhere in terms of design as it was struggling with its approved fixed budget - but that it was only right and proper to first re-state what was required in terms of design scope and request that the current design be reviewed and re-costed so that the Council could ascertain whether the project was realistically achievable within budget and to, therefore, continue with its appointed design team. As it was subsequently ascertained that the project could be delivered within budget a formal resolution was passed by a large majority to first apply for and acquire revised planning consent and then to progress immediately to re-tender.

He proposed that come the next election on the 4th of May that a referendum should be taken for the people of the town to decide if they want a beautiful proven designed building that could be open within 6 months or to go with the building the current town council want to build.

Councillor Wimble did suggest to the Council that it should consider holding off making any decision to proceed with the project in its current design and maybe ask the public what they think about having an alternative modular building instead. However, NO formal proposal was put forward or voted on. Having ascertained that the traditional build project in its current form could be delivered within budget, the FORMAL PROPOSAL was put to progress the existing project, a vote was taken and the progression of the existing project was voted through by a large majority.

The formal decision has, therefore, now been made to progress through to re-tendering of the existing project in order to deliver the project in its current form subject to a favourable outcome of the tendering process.

Furthermore, even if the Council had considered that it favoured pausing the project, a modular building could NOT be delivered within six months; any public consultation would take at least one month if it was to be deemed to be valid; a revised planning application would need to be submitted which would take at least 14 weeks - but if Councillor Wimble is correct in assuming that this could take a year to be considered by committee then this would be the same irrespective of whether the building was traditional construction or modular; the opportunity to tender to provide a

modular building would need to go through the tendering process via the government portal and would, therefore, take at least three months prior to considering tenders received.

The Council would need to go out to tender separately for pre-construction/installation demolition works and post construction/installation landscaping and car park works – none of which would be included in the installation of a modular building – nor in the indicated cost of the modular building. Whilst it could go out to tender in parallel, pre-installation works would need to be undertaken prior to installation and post-installation works would need to be undertaken after installation – thus it is NOT possible to ‘have a modular building up and running in 6 months’.

So far, the council have spent nearly half a million pounds with the Synergy Group, who are meant to do all the financial modelling and engineering to guide the council. On the night Councillor Wimble said he would not touch them with a barge pole as so far, they have advised the council for years and achieved the square root of diddley squat and wasted a huge amount of money.

The Synergy Project Management Team is NOT required to undertake all ‘engineering’ work; the Council is required to employ a whole raft of additional engineering and other consultants to prepare detailed reports and, indeed, has done so during the progression of the project to date -with Synergy dealing with instructing and managing those consultants on behalf of the Council as and when required, however, it has undertaken a huge amount of work on behalf of the Council for significantly less cost than Councillor Wimble has suggested to the public due to his very ambiguous use of language.

Councillor Wimble was provided with actual expenditure details after making this claim in the recent council meeting and in a subsequent communication with the Town Clerk – information that is, anyway, in the public domain and has always been available to him as a Town Councillor– yet chose to go ahead and state this misinformation in his article in his capacity as a Town Councillor and publish it in his article in his capacity as Editor of The Looker.

Councillor Wimble was advised of the facts as follows:

In regard to project management costs to date – the Town Council has not spent anywhere near £400,000.00 on Synergy’s fees. In fact, over the entire 6 year period, just under £102,000.00 has been spent as at 31st December 2022 – for which Synergy has undertaken a huge amount of work over the 6 year period, including managing competitive tendering processes and preparation of extremely detailed tendering packs, preparation of detailed project cost plans, overseeing all other required consultants and arranging for site investigations and reports to be undertaken as and when required, attending meetings and advising on matters as they have arisen.

The reason why the Council has not, as yet, been able to realise this project is not due to Synergy (which has worked very hard for the Council as a project management team) – but is due to the numerous unforeseen and significant delays which could not have been predicted ie. The protracted time the project was held up in the District Council planning system, followed by the further protracted period finalising the associated s106 agreement – during which time covid arrived, followed by the Ukraine war and escalating costs. Had the project not spent so long in the planning system, it

may well be that the public works loan application could have been submitted much sooner and a contract signed prior to the economic downturn.

In regard to the overall project costs to date – the Council still has not spent close to £400,000.00 during the six years up to 31st December 2022. In fact, the Council has spent under £350,000.00 to date in total (so, including the £102,000.00 project management fees) – and this has included not only the project management fees, but also all legal fees, architect fees, planning submission and planning consultant fees, and fees for all required site investigations and associated reports undertaken to date.

The Council provides a financial statement on this project at every Full Council meeting, which includes a breakdown of the current budget and all historical project spend.

The first eight years of the building project was overseen by Councillor Patricia Rolfe who resigned when the costs of building the original building was then rejected.

Councillor Patricia Rolfe could NOT have overseen the first eight years of this project since, this project was commenced in 2016 with the appointment of a Project Management Team and the Council will only in 2023 be moving into its 7th year. (As an aside, it should be noted that the smaller scale Hythe Pavilion took some 10 years to deliver, likewise, the much larger scale indoor skatepark in Folkestone also took 10 years to deliver.)

What building would you like the Council to back? The new designed council option or the option of a modular building like the one shown from one of the companies that could be delivered within 6 months and within budget?

The Council has passed a formal resolution to progress this project in its current design through planning and tendering and delivery – the decision has, therefore, been made and by a large majority vote.

A modular building ‘like the one shown’ CANNOT be delivered within 6 months as has been explained. The ‘one shown’ (or two, in fact) are not the same as the original project design and WOULD, like the Council’s traditional build design, require a revised planning application to be submitted.

This would take at least 14 weeks and, if Councillor Wimble is correct in believing that it could take a year, then his defined timescale of 6 months is clearly not possible either. Even if the planning process only takes 14 weeks, the tendering process will then take a further 12 to 14 weeks. That is 6 months alone. The successful company would then need to be appointed as the preferred contractor and an order placed – only then would the lead time commence, followed by installation – which could not take place until demolition and clearance works had been completed.

When the delivery and installation of a modular building is looked at in the context of the overall process, this would still take around a year to deliver. When you take into account the additional costs that have not been factored into simply supplying a modular building – including planning fees, consultant fees that would still be required (as it would still be necessary to undertake a range of ecological, environmental, engineering, transport surveys etc), demolition costs, landscaping costs, refurbishment

of the adjacent old building etc, nor would this, in the end, prove significantly cheaper than the fixed budget traditional design buildings that the Council has resolved to deliver, noting also that, within its fixed budget, it will be delivering TWO brand new traditionally built buildings – NOT one new build building and a facelift to an old existing building. Therefore, the council's project WILL be delivering MORE community benefit than was originally intended.

The Town Council's official press release regarding the move to progress the project through to tender and project delivery – which IS factually accurate is re-issued below for information:

New Romney Town Council Re-Commits to Delivery of New Community Hall/Sports Pavilion and Nursery Project Budget-Led Design

At its Full Council meeting on Wednesday 11th January 2023, following significant work towards the development of a Community Hall, Sports Pavilion and Nursery Project re-design that could be delivered within a set budget, New Romney Town Council decided to proceed with this traditional-build project based on the current outline design as presented to the Council. This decision, which was due very much to the re-designed project now being achievable within budget, was also possible due to the fact that, some 10 months after submitting its application for borrowing approval to part-fund this project, the Town Council had finally received consent to borrow the required £1 million and project funding had, therefore, been secured.

It was of note that, had the Council decided to proceed with the project in its original form in January 2022 and signed a construction contract at that time, it would still not have had the funds in place with which to pay for the contract a whole year later. Only now can the Council proceed to contract with surety of available funding – thus, at that time, the Council had made absolutely the right decision not to sign any contract and, instead, to review the project's finances and move forward in the direction of a budget-led project, despite the fact that this would require a project re-design. Nevertheless, the Council noted that, having now reached a point whereby the project can be progressed within the available budget, expediency moving forward would remain important in the delivery of this project, particularly due to past delays – in the main as a result of the extensive time taken for the project to go through the District Council planning and legal processes prior to finally acquiring formal planning consent along with the associated s106 Agreement.

In order to avoid further delay, having ascertained that the project could now be achieved within budget, it was formally agreed by resolution of the Council that the appointed architect be instructed to develop a full planning pack relating to the new project design and submit the new planning application on behalf of the Town Council following a pre-submission meeting with the District Council's Chief Planning Officer to minimize any risk of further planning delays. It was also formally agreed by resolution of the Council that the appointed Project Management Team be instructed to develop a revised project tendering pack in tandem with the planning submission and to advertise the revised contract opportunity via the Government Contract Finder website as soon as a new planning consent is acquired.

It was noted at last week's meeting, that the Town Council could consider going down the route of installing modular buildings, as suggested by Councillor Wimble, and that such buildings could be equally as attractive as a traditional build, however, it was the view of the Council by a very strong majority – as demonstrated by voting at the meeting - that, as a traditional build was now achievable within budget, it was preferable to go forward with a traditional build project. Thus, the architect and project management team were instructed to take the project forward in its current form.

The Council is now looking forward to taking this project back through the planning process and hopes that, with the assistance of the District Council Planning Department, this can be dealt with much more expediently this time so that the project can go back out to tender as soon as possible with a view to awarding a contract and commencing construction on this long-awaited project, which, due to a number of unforeseen circumstances alluded to above, has now been in development for some 6 years - since the 2016-17 civic year, as can be seen below:

2016

Project Management Team appointed after time spent engaging firstly in initial public consultation regarding potential uses of a capital receipt from sale of old allotment land which had concluded in 2013 and subsequent drafting and approval of a Capital Spending Plan which identified this project therein together with an initial funding allocation - and then a period of stakeholder engagement and further public consultation to establish a basic idea of what this project should provide.

2017

- 1) Architect appointed** to develop the project design for planning submission.
- 2) Disposal of remaining ex-allotment land approved**, having first sought Government approval for disposal, to part-fund the project.

2018

Submission of an application for £1 million Public Works Loan approved (to be submitted following granting of planning consent) following conclusion of public consultation delivered by Royal Mail to every address in New Romney.

2019

Project Planning Application submitted to Folkestone & Hythe District Council.

2020

FHDC Planning Committee approved the project planning application subject to associated s106 Agreement some 13 months after submission to the Planning Authority.

2021

Tendering Process undertaken, advertising the contract opportunity through the Government portal.

2022

- 1) Original Project Format halted** as significantly over budget and no prospect of bringing the design into budget. Project re-set as a Budget-led project and re-design commenced.

2) Formal Decision Notice received (some 21 months after planning consent was approved by the District Council Planning Committee) confirming planning consent for this project following protracted negotiations to finalise terms of s106 Agreement.

3) Application for Public Works Loan formally submitted – further delays then encountered with a protracted 10 month process leading to approval.

2023

1) Consent to borrow formally acquired, securing availability of £1 million Public Works Loan to part-fund the project.

2) Submission of New Planning Application approved by Town Council in respect of re-designed project.

3) Publication of new Contract Opportunity approved by Town Council on acquisition of planning consent for the project in its current format.



Hollaway

End of Press Release

Town Clerk
25th January 2023